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ABSTRACT

The roles of spirituality and spiritual learning in transformative learning are discussed. The discussion was initiated from an anti-colonial perspective on engaging spiritually in the political project of transformative learning, and it is grounded in issues of African education and in the principle of teaching critically so that education serves the spiritual development of learners and their communities. Transformative learning is seen as education that is able to resist oppression and domination by strengthening the individual self and collectives to deal with continued reproduction of colonial and re-colonial relations in academic institutions. It is argued that transformative learning must also assist learners in dealing with the pervasive effects of academic institutions' imperial structures on the processes of knowledge production and validation; understanding of indigenousness; and pursuit of agency, resistance, and politics for educational change. The following were among the recommendations to educators wanting to help students become critically and spiritually grounded and to engage in transformative learning: (1) give learners a sense of place, history, culture, and identity; (2) recognize that learners are not a generic, homogeneous group; (3) recognize the contextual variations and differences existing between teachers and their students; (4) create relevant knowledge; (5) teach collaboratively; (6) tell success stories; and (7) recognize the sociopolitical contexts of knowledge production. There are 39 references. (MN)

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SPIRITUAL KNOWING AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

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This paper discusses the place of spirituality and spiritual learning in the promotion of transformative education. In highlighting the importance of taking spirituality seriously in the politics and ontology of educational transformation, I locate my discursive framework in the discussion in the challenges of critical teaching to a diverse school audience. I bring an anti-colonial reading to what it means to engage spirituality in the political project of transformative learning. My understanding of transformative learning is that education should be able to resist oppression and domination by strengthening the individual self and the collective souls to deal with the continued reproduction of colonial and re-colonial relations in the academy. It must also assist the learner to deal with pervasive effects of imperial structures of the academy on the processes of knowledge production and validation; the understanding of indigenity; and the pursuit of agency, resistance and politics for educational change. The paper grounds the discussion in issues of African education and what it means to critically teach so that education serves the spiritual development and/or unfolding of the learner and her or his community.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the place of spirituality and spiritual learning in the promotion of transformative education. In highlighting the importance of taking spirituality seriously in the politics and ontology of educational transformation, I locate my discursive framework in the discussion in the challenges of critical teaching to a diverse school audience in North American contexts. I bring an anti-colonial reading to what it means to engage spirituality in the political project of transformative learning. My understanding of transformative learning is that education should be able to resist oppression and domination by strengthening the individual self and the collective souls to deal with the continued reproduction of colonial and re-colonial relations in the academy. It must also assist the learner to deal with pervasive effects of imperial structures of the academy on the processes of knowledge production and validation; the understanding of indigenity; and the pursuit of agency, resistance and politics for educational change. Dei, Hall and Goldin-Rosenberg (2000) have argued for working with 'indigenous knowledge' as a strategic knowledge base from which to rupture our academies (schools, colleges and universities). In this discursive politics the notion of 'indigenous is understood as the absence of colonial imposition of the knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Such knowledge reflects the common sense ideas and cultural resource knowledges of local peoples concerning everyday realities of living. It is knowledge referring to those whose authority reside in origin, place, history and ancestry. The indigenous work with the authoritative concept (see also Dei, 1999)

In sending out the 'Call for Contributors' to this special issue, the editor[s] conceptualized 'transformative learning as a form of education that "involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body-awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy" (Sullivan, 2001).

Arguably schooling in our societies today is at a cross road. I say this because of the what I see as pressing and pertinent demands being made by many critical educators for schooling to pave the way for a transformed view of our world in which all human subjects are able to assert their agency and work collectively to achieve goal of justice, peace and harmony. But of course this noble objective rests on how as a community educators and learners can marshal their inner and outer collective strengths to work for change in a world today dictated by the unfettered needs of, and access to global capital. We need a more critical, nuanced and complex analyses of the state of schooling and how the impacts of economic globalization [created by the corporate intrusion into education] have served to disenfranchised learners from our spiritual beings and made us objects of a social system that avoids meeting social responsibilities to a collective. Amidst all the decay and decadence (social, economic, material and spiritual) we see around us today, I am heartened by the existence of one fact . It is the fact that the future is itself being contested through the promulgation of radical critique and counter visions of different social, economic and ecological relationships.

I have chosen to devote my contribution to this collection to a discussion of the place of spirituality in transformative learning. I want to speak about the embodiment of the self, the spiritual sense of self in transformative learning; and how such body of knowledge not only

assists us in developing a new vision of society , but also, strengthens individual and collective souls to survive the harsh realities of human existence. To know is not always determined by what one does not know or possess. There is a body of knowledge inherent in the body that may not easily manifest itself in how we make explicit the understanding of our social existence. There is a place for spirituality and spiritual knowledge in the construction of subjectivity and identity. The self (as identity and subjectivity) is itself linked to schooling and knowledge production. It is this awareness that also makes knowledges situational, positional and contextual. The assertion of spirituality as a legitimate aspect of students' learning and knowledge is daring. But as Butler (2000) notes in the context of North American education, spirituality in modern schooling encounters two dangers: In a knowledge economy spirituality can easily be commodified., rendered simply individualistic and solipsistic, rather than as emerging out of community/human struggle for justice and dignity. Also, Butler (2000) goes further to acknowledge that approaches to spirituality need to be attentive to, critical and respectful of different religious faith traditions, including secular thought. A failure to do so could make the theorization of spirituality in schooling to be either fundamentalist. There is more potential for students to develop a sense of spirituality and strength from the local communities outside the school and, therefore, for schools themselves to foster spirituality there would need to be teachers who understand the value of the spiritual and emotional development of the learner.

A critical understanding of spirituality must not evade power questions. That is, spirituality cannot be discussed outside the contexts of power. For example we need to explore how certain spiritual values come to dominate over others. Simply, educators must eschew a liberal understanding of spirituality that separates the material from the non-material existence. Because of the predominance of Western science and dualistic thinking in schools, introducing spiritual discourse into various social imaginaries have been viewed with suspicion (see Magnusson, 2000). The spiritual discourse has either being negated, devalued or at best marginalized by Western philosophical traditions or scientific thought. In fact, important intellectual, cultural and political movements that have claimed to resist the violence of Western science and colonizing knowledges have being weary of anchoring their analysis and debates in the spiritual foundation.

In bringing spirituality to the discussion of transformative education/learning I pose the following question: how can educators organize talk, learning and pedagogy in the context of spiritual education in our schools that can motivate and enhance learning outcomes for all students? The strategies of empowering students/learners could make spaces in our schools for spirituality to be discussed, and particularly, for spiritual knowledge to be taken up as part of a school's curriculum. Spirituality and spiritual discourses broach ideas and ontologies that emphasize connectedness, belongingness, identifications, well being, love, compassion, peaceful co-existence with nature and among groups. Spirituality has always been part and parcel of the schooling experience for many learners, whether or not this is acknowledge by educators (see Dei, James, James-Wilson, Karumanchery, and Zine, 2000). Also, elsewhere , Dei (2001) I have highlighted how, for example, students, educators, and parents understanding of spirituality and how such knowledge is evoked in the contexts of Ghanaian schooling .

To the skeptic, spirituality has no place in education. In North American public and academic discourses, the mention of spirituality and education is countered with a reminder of the separation of church and state. But as Groome (1999) points out in another context, "....an established religion shouldn't mean excluding common spiritual values from our educational

system. Proselytizing on behalf of a particular religion is very different than allowing spiritual values to permeate our approach to education" (p.1). Hence the evocation of 'spirituality' is not in the context of subscribing to any high moral/religious order. The discussion of spirituality is not necessarily in association with any religious denomination or particular dogma. Religion may be a way to strengthen the spiritual sense of self. In this discussion, I allude to a meaning of 'spiritual' that is not necessarily synonymous with religion. An interest is in how spiritually influenced education is pursued in North American educational contexts as part of the processes of schooling. That is, how educators and students work with an understanding of the self and personhood as a basis to engage schooling collectively. Thus my interest is a theoretical examination of how schooling serves the spiritual development and/or unfolding of the learner and her or his community. The most important questions to engage such discussion include: for example, in what ways does spirituality manifest itself in schooling?; and, what are the challenges for promoting genuine educational options for our schools?

II. PERSONAL SUBJECT[IVE] LOCATION:

As a critical learner and pedagogue I am placed, located and implicated in the struggle to affirm diverse knowledges in order to transform schooling and education. The identity form which I speak is crucial not only in terms of contextualizing what I have to say, but also, for the reader to develop an understanding of how and why I am producing a particular kind/form of knowledge in order to make sense of my world. I am Ghanaian by birth now resident in North America. Speaking from a personal educational history and experience, I can say that formal schooling in Ghana for me was very Western and disconnected from the life of the community of which I was a member. Yet it is this education that has enabled me to pursue graduate studies in a Western academy and even teach in such an institution. One of the interesting things about the 'colonial encounter' is that as Western [formal] education strived to dislodged the learner from her or his community, the moral code of the cultural community sought to assert the self/learner within the group to which she/he belonged. Today, it is this attraction of formal schooling that many learners speak of as desirable and do not want to see on-going locally-initiated reforms place at risk (Dei, 1999). For example, students want to learn the local knowledge and [indigneous] experiences but then they also want to come out of their formal schooling with degrees and diplomas that are 'transportable' in globalized contexts. For all students struggling in such educational contexts, there have been some losses along the way, or at best, the parallel moving along of two fragmented knowledge streams.

Consequently as an adult pedagogue, I have located myself in the struggle to affirm a transformation of schooling and education that is inclusive of diverse knowledges and ways of knowing. I have further interacted with these knowledges in ways that inform, challenge and affirm the self, culture and community. I would assert that these pedagogical struggles and tensions occur on many educational fronts, one of which is spiritual. What many see as the amputation of the self from the community is one of the consequences of the importation of colonial and imperial forms of education (see also Carnoy, 1974; Mazrui, 1975). This is why many voices call for a renewed spiritual grounding of the African identity and consciousness in opposition to Eurocentric knowledge (see Asante, 1987, 1988, Ani, 1994; Dove, 1998; Asante and Abarry, 1996; Mazama, 1998). While undoubtedly schooling in Africa today faces many challenges (e.g., curriculum [ir]relevance, [in]adequate physical and material support and infrastructure), it should also be pointed out that a closer look at local situations reveals how

educators, students, parents and community workers are responding to the educational challenge. These subjects are relying on local knowledges and conceptions of the self, community, culture, learning and spirituality to fashion genuine educational alternatives.

III. THEORIZING "SPIRITUALITY"

Let me say from the outset that what I spell out as African views of spirituality may well be shared by other indigenous, non-Western peoples of the world. I make no claims of Africans having a monooplo of these ideas. In fact, any critical reader of indigenous world views and knowledge systems will note that the concept of 'ownership' of knowledge is an anti-thesis of what such counter knowledge forms imply. Furthermore, I acknowledge the diversity of views of spirituality even within a community, In Dei (2001) I point out that among cultures, there are varied meanings of spirituality. Some contested meanings of spirituality see the individual being as essentially spiritual. Spirituality is also understood in connection to humility, healing, the value of wholeness, self and collective empowerment, liberation and "reclaiming the vitality of life" (Palmer, 1999: 3). In this sense then teaching sacredness, respect, compassion, and connecting the self to the world, self to others is spiritual education (Palmer, 1999: 3). Used in the current context, I borrow from Rahnema (1995) in his view of spirituality as encompassing a "....sensitivity, the art of listening to the world at large and within one, from the hegemony of a conditioned 'me' constantly interfering in the process; the ability to relate to others and to act, without any pre-defined plan or ulterior motives; and the perennial qualities of love, compassion and goodness which are under constant assault in economized societies" (p.130).

Spiritual education embraces humility, respect, compassion and gentleness that strengthen the self and the collective human spirit of the learner. The self is a complex, integrated being with multiple layers of meaning. The individual as a learner has psychological, emotional, spiritual, and cultural dimensions not often taken up in traditional/conventional processes of schooling. Holistic education that upholds the importance of spirituality would recognize this complexity by speaking to the idea of wholeness (see Miller, 1989; 1997; 1999). Context and situation are important to understanding the complex wholeness of the individual self or being. The individual has responsibilities to the community and it is through spiritual education that the connection between the person and the community is made. To promote education for change is to view the self as a resisting subject. It is also to destroy the self/other dichotomy, rendering the self as not autonomous but connecting to a larger collective. Spiritual education stresses the dominance of individual spirit and the power of self and self-mind for collective empowerment. The subject as the person upholds an inner understanding of oneself and of one's relationship to others.

Arguably, there are local and contextual variations in the understandings of knowledge, reality, subjectivity/objectivity. For example, African spiritual knowings are intimately bound up with the affirmation of self and indigenous subjectivity. Spiritual and emotional involvement are inseparable in the production of knowledge. Many African ways of knowing (and, in fact, other Indigenous peoples) affirm that personal subjectivity and emotionality must be legitimized rather than devalued. Such knowing also asserts that the subjectivity/objectivity and rationality/ irrationality dualities or splits are false. In fact, while spiritual knowledge challenges subject-object dualism, it simultaneously upholds 'objectivity' to the subjective experience and similarly some 'subjectivity' to the objective reality. The subjective is capable of comprehending the 'objective universe'. Subjectivity is a personal interpretation while objectivity can be simply the

material and immaterial reality. It is important to reiterate that this understanding of spirituality (unlike liberal conceptions of spirituality) does not efface questions of power and power relations (self/other/group relation) nor does it falsely dichotomises or separates the material and the non-material.

The individual can be both spiritual and non-spiritual; spiritual in the sense of acknowledging the power of the inner will to know and understand the self and to be able to interact with the outer world and the collective. To be non-spiritual is a failure to show individual humility and to work with the knowledge that comes with knowing the self and inner spirit. African spirituality stresses mind, body, soul interactions. Such spirituality is about values, beliefs and ideas of integrity, dignity that shape individual consciousness into a collective and unified existence. Spirituality need not be imposed. The individual develops a spirituality through the engagement of society, culture and nature interrelations.

Closely connected to spirituality is the view of emotions as an important source of knowledge. Emotion is that body of knowledge gained in and out of both the subjective and objective forms of existence. Emotional knowledge develops alongside intuition. It is knowledge that is embedded in the self and speaks to compassion of the human sense and mind. Read in a broad context, the notion of 'emotional intelligence,' as espoused by Cooper (1997), is very useful. Cooper (1997) sees emotional intelligence as "the ability to sense, understand and effectively apply the power and acumen of emotions as a source of human energy, information and influence. Human emotions are the domain of core feeling, gut-level instincts and emotional sensations. When trusted and respected, emotional intelligence provides a deeper, more fully formed understanding of oneself and those around us" (p.13).

Using these definitions of the spiritual and the emotional, an important ontological question is: what are the working assumptions about the nature of reality held by educators and students? In the Ghanaian/African systems of thought, the **ontological** viewpoint stresses that to understand reality is to have a complete or holistic view of society. The view stresses the need for a harmonious co-existence between nature, culture and society. There is the idea of mutual interdependence among all peoples such that the existence of the individual/subject is only meaningful in relation to the community that she or he is part of. The view also stresses the physical and metaphysical connection and the fact that the subject cannot be understood in its atomistic sense.

Also relevant to this discussion is an epistemological question, which emerges as: what are ways of knowing about such reality as applied by educators and learners? The **epistemological** position enthuses that there are different ways of knowing and conceptualizing reality. Knowledge is seen as cumulative and as emerging from experiencing the social world. Knowledge emerges from the interplay of body, mind and soul. The existence of a metaphysical realm also means an uncertainty of knowledge and the possibility that intuition and emotions offer sites of knowing for the human senses. Relying on intuition and experiential knowledge allows the self to know and understand the outer world. If practice and experience are seen as the contextual basis of self-generated knowledge, then knowledge and survival both go hand in hand. Furthermore, the knowledge that membership in the community accords rights, there are important matching responsibilities to tie the individual self to the collective.

A further body of knowledge ties epistemology with ethics. The **axiological** position maintains that within societies there are "... disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values...[that is]... presumptions about the real, the true and the good" (Scheurich and Young, 1997:6). In Ghanaian and African systems of thought the cultural, spiritual and

ideational beliefs, values and practices are evaluated in the history and contexts of communities, as societies strive to set their own moral tone. While these ideas may be shared by other indigenous peoples, it is the privileging of certain core social values for 'reward' (e.g., responsibilities over rights; community over individual; peaceful co-existence with nature over control or domination of nature) that sets different knowledge systems apart. The understanding of the spiritual self allows one to define her or his moral tone within the broad contexts of the society that the individual is part of. The individual is a subject, the individual is part of a community, the cultural norms of the groups guide and influence human behaviour and action, and the spiritual existence is central to material existence.

As already noted, the Ghanaian/African concept of spirituality is part of a worldview that is often difficult for a Western-educated person to understand. The Western educational discourse tends to regard the subject of spirituality with suspicion, thus missing out a dimension that, many would argue, is of key importance in African education. There is a form of local spiritual knowing that is connected to the land, to the people, to ancestors, and to a community. For example, individuals are traditionally brought up to appreciate the community and to know that they live in a land bestowed unto them by their forebears. Their ancestors still guard over the community. They keep a watchful eye on everyday practice and social activity. There is a belief that the individual living subject could be punished for going against the wishes of the ancestors and/or for not looking out for the interests of the larger group or community. This was an important knowledge base which unfortunately has been corrupted with time and with consequences.

In connecting 'knowledge', the 'spiritual' and the 'religions' it is not suggested that all local cultural knowledges are spiritual, or that religion is synonymous with spiritual. Rather the concept of spirituality that will emerge from this study embraces all three realms. Many Africans who grew up in traditional communities view with concern the continued erosion of the kind of education [not schooling] they received in their homes/families. What is being referred to is the separation of education from local communities that has left many poor rural communities disenfranchised from schooling both in access and in content. The separation of education from local communities must be understood in the privileging of schooling over education, that is to schooling purported to take place within formal institutional structures. It is indeed the formal school tradition that the various externally and locally reforms have tried to change. In that context, children from poor rural communities were disenfranchised from opportunities of formal learning if their parents could not afford to pay to send them to boarding school because they needed them to work on the farm. Those who did go to 'school' were uprooted from their families, cultures and communities. Their formal learning was disconnected from the 'land' and community to which they belonged. It is important then for learning, teaching and administration of education to reclaim these understandings in the search for genuine educational options.

IV. TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING: TEACHING AND LEARNING TO BECOME CRITICAL AND SPIRITUALLY GROUNDED.

I want now to focus on the roles of educators to promote transformative education to students. I begin by asking: So, what then should our teaching strategies be in order to promote

transformative learning? I should caution that at this stage my interest is not on the specifics of such methods. I am more interested in the philosophical grounding for or approaches behind teaching methods, and particularly, the method of teaching that seeks the spiritual and emotional engagement of the learner in her/his education. In this context teaching, learning, and in fact education becomes an emotionally felt experience that spiritually transforms the learner. The learner's self and social identities are key to engaging and producing knowledge for change.

1. History, Place and Culture:

It is important for teaching to ground the learner in a sense of place, history, culture and identity. An identification with the social and natural environments in which teaching and learning occurs must be seen as key to spiritual and emotional self development. Given that educational practices in some [indigenous] communities are quite different than those in North America transformative teaching must examine how notions of self, personhood, place, history, culture, and belongningness to community are manifested in specific cultural contexts/values. Such knowledge is fundamental not only in terms of providing some sense of what it means to be spiritual, but also, understanding how learning happens in diverse contexts. For example, how are creativity and self reflection expressed in different cultural contexts? How do educators encourage creativity [beyond mere cognitive competencies], critical thinking and emotional engagement of the learner in the schooling process? Providing answers to these questions call for a deep appreciation and awreness of the particular metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, and social values of learners, and how these manifest themselves in specific social and educational practices. For many learners a knowledge of history, place and culture helps to cultivate a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

2. Acknowledging Difference:

Critical teaching must see learners beyond homogeneity and the generic construction of 'students' and candidly explore all the emerging contestations, contradictions and ambiguities in peoples' lives. This serves to give a spiritual identity to the individual self as a basis from which to make connection to the group or the community of learners. Learners do not go to see as disembodied persons. Their race, class, gender and sexual identities assist learners to pursue particular social and educational politics. There is also the power of difference. That is, seeing students/learners as powerfully demarcated by race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, culture and religion implicate knowledge production. Thus identity is linked to schooling.

3. Beyond Particularities:

The diversity and contextual variations and differences in ourselves and our students must always be visible in our pedagogic practice. But that in itself is not enough. We must challenge the essentializing of difference. I say this because there is only so much we can know from the entry point of an unitary fragmentary around difference. The world today is all about difference. Yet difference is beginning to mean nothing much. So we must connect the particularities and the historical specificities to their broader, macro-political, economic and spiritual contexts. For example, to see the learner within the globalized context and showing how the globalized contexts itself can and is being resisted just as the 'global encounter' still shapes and influences

the specificities and the particular.

4. Creating Relevant Knowledge

I gesture to the power and efficacy of teaching relevant knowledge, that is, knowledge anchored in local people's aspirations, concerns and needs. It is knowledge local peoples' can identify with. It is based on the philosophical p[ositions that we must understand our students, learners and even the subjects of our study on their own terms. For example, writing about Africa and African peoples Richard Sklar (1998) has rightly noted that those who seek to interpret Africa must develop a sympathetic understanding of African thoughts and values, as well as history and culture. This is crucial in order for the appraoch to transformative learning to grasp total human condition of a people. Teaching as a method and a means to create relevant knowledge is crucial if we are to succeed in constructing an identities outside of that identity that has and continues to be constructed in Euro-American ideology and hegemonic knowings. It calls for developing a particular prism, one that frames issues and questions within a particular lens: 'Is this in the best interests of the learner? Educators cannot take a comforting escape route which says 'no one knows what is in the best interests of our students'. At least we can initiate our teaching practice posing the relevant questions to begin with. We can begin by collectively identifying our shared and competing and sometimes contradictory/oppositional interests. Creating relevant knowledge begins by identifying, generating and articulating a pedagogic theory and practice that uses lived and actual experiences of local peoples as a starting base of knowledge generation.

5. Collaborative Teaching.

I am aware of desires and perils of collaboration at all times. And yet, I make a case for collaborative teaching on many fronts. For example, engaging students, local communities in the process of knowledge generation. Teaching across disciplines and subject matters. Also collaborative teaching that sees experience [and practice] as the contextual basis of knowledge. Such collaboration should challenge the split between 'the sources of raw data' and the 'place of academic theorizing'. It must present communities as active, spiritual subjects, resistors and creators, not just victims of their own histories and experiences. But such collaborative teaching will attest to the power of identity and its linkage with/to knowledge production. Thus, who is teaching about Africa is equally important. In our teaching academies, physical representation of different bodies is significant to rupturing conventional [academic] knowledge.

6. Telling Success Stories:

Teaching should tell the success stories as well as the failures and disasters. We must challenge the academic attraction and fetish of focussing on 'failures' . We must ask: What can we learn from the success cases; the sites and sources of local peoples resisting and empowering themselves through their own creativity and resourcefulness;

7. The Dangers, Perils and Seduction of Romanticism, Overmythicization, and the Claim to Authenticity.

It developing counter discourses, iis easy to romanticize about a people after so much negativity

and selective miscapturings of their history. But critical teaching must eschew this practice. For example, it is important to be aware of the dangers of romanticization and overmythicization as we speak and write about the colonized 'other/encounter' in order to counter the negativity and untruths of the past. It serves well to frequently ask ourselves 'Why Write Back' the same way. On a related point, I see all knowledges as contested. There is always a selective representation of the past [and knowledge] (see also Briggs, 1996; Clifford, 1983; Keesing, 1989; Makang, 1997; Linnekin, 1991, 1992). Teaching it is contested educational practice. And, I view with deep suspicion any claim to 'authenticity' as possessing authority or authoritative voice that is not open to challenge or critique (Handler, 1988). As many others have argued there is the impurity of any claim to an untainted past. The past is itself subject to colonial and imperial contamination. But in taking this critical stance to 'authenticity' I do not dismiss the power of imaginary mythologies as part of the decolonizing project. As an anti-colonial pedagogue I share Lattas (1993) view that the past must be recreated "as a way of formulating an uncolonized space to inhabit" (p. 254).

8. The Socio-Political Contexts of Knowledge Production:

For those of us who teach, research, write, study, and, in fact, 'produce knowledge' about human communities, it is useful to know and remember that the sources and uses of data are not apolitical. There are always profound social and political contexts and consequences for our constructions of knowledge. All knowledges are contingent in particular social and political contexts. Therefore, in our teaching practices we must always be conscious of the socio-environmental and political contexts of data gathering [knowledge production]. In many parts of our world people's freedoms have been taken away as they teach critically and politically .

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING:

I would admit that the issues I have raised are by no means exhaustive nor the last [un]spoken words on the topic. Much precedes this discussion and there is room for further debates and counter stances. I always like to work with a philosophy of work and I refuse to think that each of our agendas are so powerful that there is not room to hear another. So allow me to conclude my brief comments with this question: Where am I going with all this merging of the political and academic? I would stress that what I am calling for is teaching and learning for spiritual and political emancipation. Transformative education needs a discursive prism from which to anchor a critical educational practice. That is, the creation and use of African epistemologies, perspectivisms in our teaching practice based on the idea that there are important culturally distinctive ways of knowing. Within the myriad epistemologies, there is a powerful conception that all elements of the universe derive from a similar substance, the spiritual. Hence emotions and intuitions are effective ways of gaining knowledge (Agyakwa, 1998). Western scienticism cannot be dismissive of this body of knowledge. Local communities must be understood not simply within a so-called Western rational thought but instead within an indigenous, culturally contextualized genesis. It is also about putting all learners at the centre of our discursive and teaching practices/our academic engagements. Critically teaching as decolonization must not simply deconstruct/interrogate/challenge imperial, colonial and oppressive knowledges, but also, subvert the hegemonizing of particular cultural, symbolic and political practices and significations (see also Wilson-Tagoe, 1997; Smith, 1999). If anything, I see my project today as

one conceived in the political and academic practice of imagining and creating shifting representations of knowledge that counter static and fixed definitions and interpretations of the subjects of our study.

The main argument of this paper has been that spirituality and spiritual knowing is a valid body of knowledge that can be pursued in schooling to enhance schooling outcomes of a diverse body (see also Sharma, 2001). Spirituality encourages the sharing of personal and collective experiences of understanding and dealing with the self. Olson (2000) notes that the issues of spirituality in learning and pedagogical situations are critical for transformative teaching given that much of what is "universal" in spirituality exists in its manifestations in the particulars of knowing and asserting who we are, what our cultures are, and where we come from. Hence a discussion of spirituality in education must be read as anti-thesis to the concept that the learning of curriculum is ever solely "universal" where universal means neutral and common to all. Spirituality is a form in which we identify ourselves and the universal and, is therefore, an implicit way of asserting ourselves collectively and individually as creators and resistors, and as agents and subjects of change. Therein lies the critical understanding of spirituality as a powerful tool in resisting mis-education, domination or oppressive forces of schooling. When educators deny or refuse to engage spirituality and spiritual knowing their educational practices can be destructive of the goal of education to tranform society. Spiritual knowing must be be utilized to involve and energize schools and local communities.

What spiritual knowing shows is that in the politics of knowledge production as educators we must recognize the limitations and possibilities. There are significant limitations in our pedagogues, communicative and discursive practices. One such limitations can be the intellectual arrogance of knowing it all. It is important to work with the power of not knowing and allowing oneself to be challenged by other knowledges. Also, we must recognize all discursive positions have the tendency to be essentialist positions. To take the position of difference does not exempt us from this critique whether we are anti-racist, anti-colonial, post-colonial or postmodernist theorists. As Maliha Chisti (1999: 16) right notes we can fall "into the traps of complete unilateral fragmentation around difference". Furthermore, it is important for us to note that how we occupy spaces and the meanings we inscribe on our bodies and onto these spaces are equally important as our political practices. Thus, the need to constantly explore : what political space do we choose to occupy at particular moments and why? Finally, we must continually acknowledge the dangers of the fixity in our positions and seek to continually learn across different knowledges.

There are many possibilities that our pedagogues and communicative practices can offer us in the politics of transformative education. There is the power of human/intellectual agency. That is, for me, as a minority scholar operating from an anti-colonial and anti-racist lens the capacity to project oneself into one's own experience, culture and history instead of continuing to live on borrowed terms of the dominant is crucial (see also Mazama,1998). We must endeavour to see resistance as important in the small acts, as well as in major actions that lead to transformation. We can also be aware in our teaching practices that the more differentiated we are, the more interdependent we must be. We can defining our academic politics not simply in terms of who we are (identities) but also what we want to achieve (see Yuval-Davis, 1994) so that we work together not strictly on the basis of our racialized, gendered, classed and classed identities but also on the basis of the politics we wish to pursue.

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